



# Northern Ireland Assembly

## AD HOC COMMITTEE ON A BILL OF RIGHTS

### MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

**Thursday 28<sup>th</sup> January 2021**  
**Virtual Meeting, StarLeaf**

Present, via StarLeaf: Emma Sheerin MLA (Chairperson)  
Mike Nesbitt MLA (Deputy Chairperson)  
Paula Bradshaw MLA  
Mark Durkan MLA  
Michelle McIlveen MLA  
Carál Ní Chuilín MLA

Apologies: Christopher Stalford MLA

In Attendance: Caroline Perry (Assembly Clerk)  
Gareth Cross (Clerical Officer)  
David McClure (Assistant Assembly Clerk)

*The meeting commenced in open session at 2.06 p.m.*

#### **1. Apologies**

As noted above.

#### **2. Chairperson's Business**

There was no Chairperson's business.

### **3. Draft Minutes**

*Agreed:* The Ad Hoc Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 17<sup>th</sup> December 2020.

### **4. Matters Arising**

There were no matters arising.

### **5. Correspondence**

Members noted correspondence from the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission, Age NI, the Children's Law Centre and Dermot Nesbitt as well as requests to give evidence from the Northern Ireland Women's European Platform, the Women's Policy Group NI, HERe NI and TransgenderNI.

*Agreed:* Members agreed to send invitations to give evidence to the Northern Ireland Women's European Platform, the Women's Policy Group NI, HERe NI and TransgenderNI.

*Mark Durkan joined the meeting at 2:09pm.*

### **6. Briefing by Professor Dominic Bryan, Queen's University Belfast, on Human Rights and Culture**

Dominic Bryan, Professor in the School of History, Anthropology, Philosophy and Politics at Queen's University Belfast, joined the meeting via StarLeaf at 2.10 p.m.

His briefing outlined that he was not seeking to address arguments for or against a Bill of rights for Northern Ireland but to make some specific points about rights as they relate to culture and on the development of a culture of rights. Furthermore, he detailed the complexity of national identities within Northern Ireland in relation to community and rights. Professor Bryan stated that equality is central to rights.

The oral evidence was followed by a question and answer session.

The Chairperson thanked Dominic for his evidence.

The briefing session was reported by Hansard.

## **7. Briefing by Professor Colin Harvey, Queen's University Belfast, on the History, Context and Content of a Bill of Rights**

Colin Harvey, Professor of Human Rights Law in the School of Law, Queen's University Belfast, joined the meeting via StarLeaf at 2.42 p.m.

He discussed the context of the Committee's work, noting that Members are not starting with a blank page as there has been a lot of work done previously over the last twenty years. Professor Harvey welcomed the establishment of the Committee and said that it is good that there is now the momentum with *New Decade, New Approach* to help re-kick start the process which has been stalled since the NIHRC advice in 2008. Professor Harvey hoped that the Committee would be able to move the debate onwards and noted the work done by the Bill of Rights Forum, NIHRC and civil society. Professor Harvey stated that a Bill of Rights is a framework of protection and suggested that you cannot have a credible Bill of Rights without equality at its core.

*Michelle McIlveen left the meeting at 3:14 pm.*

*Mike Nesbitt left the meeting at 3:20 pm.*

The oral evidence was followed by a question and answer session.

The Chairperson thanked Colin for his evidence.

The briefing session was reported by Hansard.

*Paula Bradshaw left the meeting at 3:32 pm.*

*The meeting adjourned at 3.33 p.m.*

**Ms Emma Sheerin MLA**  
**Chairperson, Ad Hoc Committee on a Bill of Rights**